LETTERS

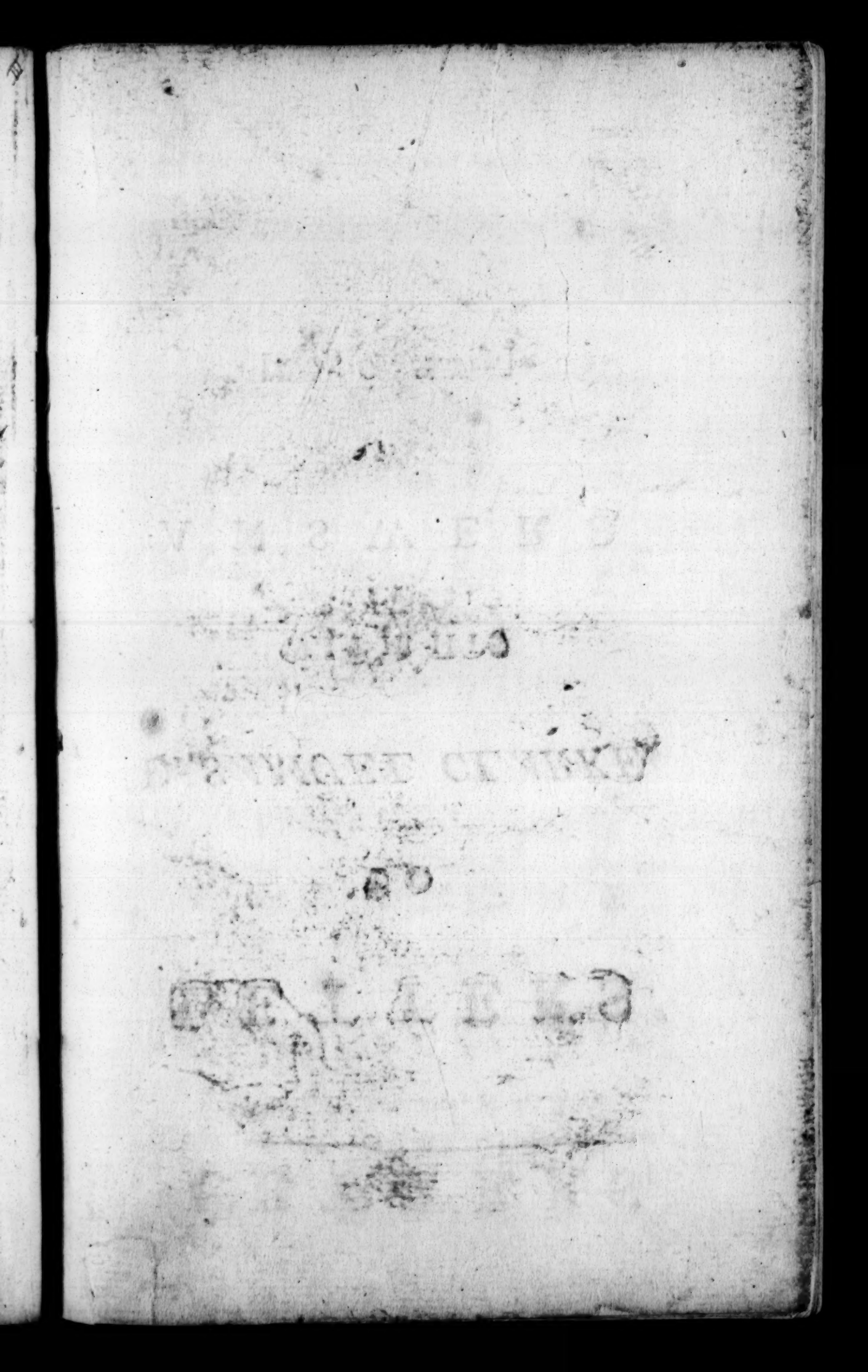
TO

Dr. *SAMUEL CLARKE.*

WITH HIS

ANSWERS.

[*Price, One Shilling.*]



LETTERS

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Written, in MDCCXXV, to the Rev.

Dr. *SAMUEL CLARKE*,

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RELATING TO AN

ARGUMENT

Advanced by the DOCTOR, in his

DEMONSTRATION of the BEING and ATTRIBUTES of GOD, in proof of the UNITY of the DEITY:

WITH THE

DOCTOR's ANSWERS.

LONDON:

Printed by DANIEL BROWNE, in *Crane-court, Fleet-ſtreet*,

FOR

M. COOPER, at the *Globe* in *Pater-noſter-row*. MDCCXLV.

ADVERTISEMENT.

SUCH of the following letters as have Dr. CLARKE's name to them, carry ſuch plain marks of their genuineneſs, that no reader, converſant in his writings, can poſſibly doubt of it. The metaphyſical productions of that great man are eaſy to be diſtin-

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diſtinguiſhed from thoſe of others, by that remarkable perſpicuity, conciſeneſs, and ſtrength, which are ſo happily united in them; and which cannot be imitated.

THE other letters in this ſmall collection were written by the ingenious author of a pamphlet, intituled, "The "main argument of a late "book, intituled, 'Chriſtia-"nity as old as the creation,' "fairly ſtated and examined; "or

" or a ſhort view of that whole
" controverſy. Printed for
" Mr. Rivington in St. Paul's
" Church-yard."

THIS gentleman died a few years ſince, and left behind him a rare example of the greateſt humility and candour, joined to an admirable capacity, and extenſive knowledge.

So many volumes of letters have been favourably received among

among us, without having any thing to recommend them, beſide the popularity of the names they bear, that, ſurely, it is needleſs to apologize for the publication of the following; which have not only the fame of one of their authors, but alſo the importance of the ſubject to recommend them to the reader.

LET-

LETTERS

TO

Dr. *SAMUEL CLARKE.*

WITH HIS

ANSWERS.

First Letter.

Reverend Sir,

UPON reading the letters annexed to your diſcourſe of the propheſies, I have been lately turning over in my mind your proof of the unity of God,

therein referred to. But though I have generally the happineſs to perceive the force of your reaſonings, yet, in this particular, I cannot at preſent diſcern it; and muſt therefore beg your aſſiſtance. This you have ſo kindly afforded to ſuch as appeared ſincere in the ſearch of truth, though entirely unknown to you, that I am almoſt tempted to flatter myſelf with the hopes of the like favour; if what I have to offer be not wholly impertinent. And I am the rather inclin'd to propoſe to you my thoughts on this ſubject, becauſe, as you eſteem the matter to be no trifle, ſo you ſeem particularly deſirous of having it thoroughly diſcuſſed.

BUT ſince the fallacy of this, and ſome other metaphyſical arguments, ſeems to lie in the ambiguous uſe of the term [neceſſary exiſtence] I crave leave firſt to explain myſelf a little on that head, in a few propoſitions.

I. IN general, that Being is neceſſarily exiſtent, whoſe non-exiſtence is impoſſible.

II. A thing is impoſſible, either when it implies a contradiction to our ideas, or to the nature of things.

III. ACCORDINGLY, there are two ſorts of neceſſary exiſtence. A Being is neceſſarily exiſtent, either when it would imply a contradiction to our ideas that he ſhould not exiſt; or

when his non-exiſtence is a contradiction in the nature of things: that is (as you expreſs it) " when he ex-
" iſts by an abſolute neceſſity ori-
" ginally in the nature of the thing
" itſelf." [*Demonſ. edit.* iii. *p.* 16.]

IV. THOUGH we cannot but conclude, that whatſoever appears a contradiction to our ideas, is impoſſible in the nature of things; (otherwiſe there would be an end of all reaſoning) yet we may eaſily imagine, that what implies no contradiction to our ideas, may be impoſſible in the nature of things: for this may be owing to the imperfection of our ideas, or want of ſufficient intermediate ones, or of due attendance to thoſe we have: *e. g.* To no leſs a man than

than Mr. LOCKE, it ſeemed not impoſſible, that matter ſhould have a power of thinking ſuperadded to it; which yet you yourſelf are univerſally allowed, to have demonſtrated to imply a contradiction.

V. CONSEQUENTLY, though whatſoever Being is neceſſarily exiſtent (*i. e.* when it would imply a contradiction to our ideas not to exiſt) is alſo neceſſarily exiſtent in his own nature; yet a Being may be neceſſarily exiſtent in his own nature, when it would imply no contradiction to our ideas not to exiſt.

VI. THAT there is but one Being neceſſarily exiſtent, *viz.* whom it would imply a contradiction to our ideas

ideas not to exiſt, I readily grant: but that there is no more than one neceſſarily exiſtent in his own nature, (which ſeems the true metaphyſical notion of non-exiſtence) remains to be proved.

THESE things I thought fit to premiſe, before I came to your argument; in which you ſeem to confound theſe two notions of neceſſary exiſtence, or at leaſt to conſider them as inſeparably connected.

THE whole of your argument, by comparing the demonſtration with the letters, I take to be this: "Space "and duration being evidently ne- "ceſſary [*ſine qua non*] to the ex- "iſtence of every thing elſe whatſo- ever;

" ever; and yet themſelves not ſub-
" ſtances, but properties [of the ſelf-
" exiſtent ſubſtance] ſhew evidently,
" that the ſubſtance, without which
" theſe properties could not ſubſiſt,
" is itſelf much more (if that were
" poſſible) neceſſary; [*Lett. p.* 23.]
" and conſequently can be but one.
" For to ſuppoſe two (or more) dif-
" ferent natures exiſting of them-
" ſelves neceſſarily, and independent
" from each other, implies this plain
" contradiction; that each of them
" being independent from the other,
" they may either of them be ſup-
" poſed to exiſt alone: ſo that it
" will be no contradiction to ima-
" gine the other not to exiſt; and,
" conſequently, neither of them will
" be neceſſarily exiſting. [*Demonſ.*
" *ed.*

" *ed.* iii. *p.* 50.] Whatſoever is ne-
" ceſſarily exiſting, there is need of
" its exiſtence, in order to the ſup-
" poſal of the exiſtence of any other
" thing; ſo that nothing can poſſibly
" be ſuppoſed to exiſt, without pre-
" ſuppoſing and inclnding antece-
" dently the exiſtence of that which
" is neceſſary. Therefore the ſup-
" poſing any thing poſſibly to exiſt
" alone, ſo as not neceſſarily to in-
" clude the preſuppoſal of ſome other
" thing, proves demonſtrably, that
" that other thing is not neceſſarily-
" exiſting; becauſe, whatever has
" neceſſity of exiſtence cannot poſſi-
" bly, in any conception whatſo-
" ever, be ſuppoſed away." [*Lett.*
p. 10, 11.]

Now,

Now, that ſpace or expanſion, and duration, that is, eternity and immenſity, or (to ſpeak more properly) to be eternal and immenſe, are properties of a neceſſarily-exiſtent being, is moſt certainly true. Farther, it is allowed, that ſpace and duration are neceſſary to the exiſtence of every thing: which, in other words, (I think) is no more than this, that nothing can exiſt which is not expanded, and doth not endure. And if this be the true ſenſe of the words, (as I believe it is) it will be manifeſtly abſurd to ſay, that the ſelf-exiſtent being is thus neceſſary to the exiſtence of any thing: and conſequently, that part of your argument which is built on this ſuppoſition muſt fall to the ground. But taking the ex-

preſſion in this ſenſe, *viz.* that nothing can exiſt, but ſpace and duration muſt be ſuppoſed to co-exiſt with it; (which I ſuppoſe is what you mean by ſaying, that nothing can exiſt without ſpace and duration) I acknowledge, that the ſubſtance of ſpace and duration is, in the ſame ſenſe, neceſſary to the exiſtence of every thing. As nothing can exiſt without ſpace and duration; ſo nothing can exiſt without that Being, whoſe properties they are: that is, nothing can be ſuppoſed to exiſt, but the ſubſtance of ſpace and duration muſt co-exiſt with it. Two neceſſary Beings could not therefore exiſt alone, or one without the other, in this ſenſe; that is, one could not exiſt, and the other be

ſuppoſed

ſuppoſed not to exiſt with it; becauſe they are both neceſſarily-exiſtent. But why may they not be ſuppoſed to exiſt alone, in another ſenſe, *viz.* without any dependence on each other? Or, if ſuch a neceſſity of the exiſtence of the one to that of the other beſpeaks any dependence, how can it be proved, that whatſoever is neceſſarily-exiſtent is thus independent? This is the Gloceſterſhire gentleman's objection; I mention it only for the ſake of your anſwer, which he ſeems to have overlooked. You ſay, " What exiſts neceſſarily not " only muſt ſo exiſt alone as to be " independent of any thing elſe; " but (being ſelf-ſufficient) may alſo " ſo exiſt alone, as that every thing " elſe may poſſibly (or without any

" contradiction in the nature of " things) be ſuppoſed not to exiſt " at all; and conſequently, (ſince " that which may poſſibly be ſuppo- " ſed not to exiſt at all is not neceſ- " ſarily-exiſtent) no other thing can " be neceſſarily-exiſtent." [*Letters*, *p.* 10.] To which I reply; that, from the ſelf-ſufficiency of the neceſſarily-exiſting Being, it follows indeed, not only that he may, but that he muſt, ſo exiſt alone, as that every thing elſe may, without any prejudice to his exiſtence or happineſs, be ſuppoſed not to exiſt at all: and this is all that is included in my notion of ſelf-ſufficiency. But if it be ſaid, that whatever is ſelf-ſufficient may ſo exiſt alone, as that every thing elſe may poſſibly (or without any contradiction

tradiction in the nature of things) be ſuppoſed not to exiſt at all, the queſtion returns, How can it be proved, that whatever exiſts neceſſarily is in this ſenſe ſelf-ſufficient? This can never be determined till we know whether there are more Beings than one exiſting by an abſolute neceſſity in nature; and therefore, to ſuppoſe the neceſſarily-exiſtent Being thus ſelf-ſufficient, ſeems begging the queſtion.

As to the latter part of your argument, *viz.* That whatever is neceſſarily-exiſting, there is need of its exiſtence, in order to the ſuppoſal of the exiſtence of every other thing, *&c.* this holds good, if by a neceſſarily-exiſtent Being you mean one whom

whom it is a contradiction to our ideas not to exiſt: but if you mean a Being neceſſary in his own nature, the proof is ſtill wanting; unleſs it is impoſſible for a Being to be neceſſary in his own nature, who is not neceſſary in our ideas; the contrary to which is (I think) true. For theſe reaſons, your argument does not appear to me concluſive. If it ſhould be expected that I ſhould demonſtrate this point from other principles; I muſt own the taſk is too hard for me. I am much inclin'd to the opinion of thoſe, who think the UNITY of GOD is incapable of being proved, otherwiſe than by revelation.

As for the difficulties which you hint at, that the acknowledgment of the UNITY of GOD is, in ſcripture, ſuppoſed incumbent upon all, as a firſt principle of natural religion; and polytheiſm condemned as a capital crime, even amongſt the heathens; I anſwer, That there is ONE GOD is the firſt ſpeculative principle of natural religion: that HE only is to be worſhipped, ſince no other can be proved a proper object of it, is a primary, practical principle of natural religion: conſequently, they who, together with, or inſtead of, the ONE GOD, whom their reaſon had diſcovered, worſhip any other, deſerve to be condemned; eſpecially if they are ſuch beings as the

the heathen deities are repreſented to be.

I HAVE no more to add; but that I am,

REVEREND SIR,

with the utmoſt reſpect,

April 14, 1725.

your moſt humble ſervant.

ANSWER

ANSWER to the FIRST LETTER.

SIR,

THE whole ſtrength of your objection (I think) lies in this; that, as matter is in its own nature incapable of thought, and a circle in its own nature incapable of being ſquared, and the diagonal of a ſquare in its own nature incommenſurable to the ſide, and yet many men may not be able to find theſe things contradictory to their ideas; ſo a Being may perhaps be neceſſarily-exiſtent in its own nature, and yet imply no contradiction to our ideas, not to exiſt.

I ANSWER: In one caſe, men, for want of underſtanding the nature of the ſubject, and through want of clear ideas, may eaſily not be able to ſee a contradiction, which can be come at only through many intermediate ideas: and, in this caſe, the implying no contradiction to mens ideas does not ſignify, that men can poſſibly in their imaginations think the contrary ideas conſiſtent; but it only ſignifies, that they are (ſo far) ignorant, and can not, or do not, compare the ideas at all. But, in the other caſe, the ideas (of exiſting neceſſarily, and of poſſibly not exiſting) being clear and immediate ideas, 'tis as certain and evident, that a Being cannot be neceſſarily-

ceſſarily-exiſtent in its own nature, when it would imply no contradiction to our ideas not to exiſt; as that no other contradiction can poſſibly be any more in the nature of things, than it can poſſibly be in our ideas.

I AM,

SIR,

Your very humble Servant,

London,
April 17, 1725.

S. CLARKE.

SECOND LETTER.

REVEREND SIR,

I HAD the honour to receive your's of the 17th inſtant; for which I return you my heartieſt thanks.

YOU have rightly pitched upon the main ſtrength of my objection; but I fear the unwarineſs of my expreſſions have led you ſomewhat to miſtake my meaning. That a neceſſarily-exiſtent Being ſhould not exiſt, is indeed an expreſs contradiction; and, like any other contradiction, can no more be ſuppoſed poſſible

poſſible in nature, than in our ideas. If therefore there is more than one Being neceſſarily-exiſtent in his own nature, it would be a contradiction alſo in our ideas to ſuppoſe him not to exiſt, did we know there was any ſuch. But the queſtion is, whether, for want of a medium to diſcover the exiſtence of more than one, we may not, by miſtake, conclude all other beings poſſible not to exiſt? which comes at laſt to this, whether whatever is poſſible in our ideas is poſſible in the nature of things? That whatever is impoſſible in our ideas is impoſſible in the nature of things, I granted; but that it is ſo *vice verſa*, is what I doubt; and, could I ſee proved, your argument would appear demonſtrative. The

inſtance

inſtance which I mentioned is not (as you have ſhewn) exactly parallel: all that I would conclude from it is this; that if, for want of due attendance to the ideas which we have, even thinking perſons may apprehend that to be poſſible which is not; much more may we ſuppoſe it poſſible for us, from the imperfection of our ideas, or the want of intermediate ones, to think that poſſible, which in the nature of things is abſolutely impoſſible. And, if ſo, the proving that all beings ſave ONE, may, in our conception, poſſibly not exiſt, is different from proving, that there is but ONE Being neceſſarily-exiſtent in his own nature; or whoſe non-exiſtence is impoſſible in the nature of things.

If I have not been already too troubleſome, let me intreat the continuance of your favour; which will be moſt gratefully received by,

Reverend Sir,

Your highly obliged,

April 23, 1725.

Humble Servant.

Answer

Answer to the Second Letter.

Sir,

As the idea of one neceſſary-infinite-exiſtent is an obvious idea, indeſtractible at firſt ſight, and not proved ſuch by a number of intermediate ideas; I think, the idea of another neceſſary-infinite-exiſtent (if any ſuch there were) would be ſo likewiſe, for the ſame reaſon as the firſt; and as the idea of two ſuch neceſſary-infinite-exiſtents, would be perfectly coincident (that is, merely a repetition of the ſame); ſo would the beings themſelves likewiſe be. If it were poſſible (and

conſe-

conſequently knowable, by means of any number of intermediate ideas) that two immenſities were neceſſary, it could not but be at leaſt poſſible, to have an idea of two neceſſary immenſities: and yet two ſuch are evidently not two, but one and the ſame twice imagined.

I THINK, whatever is poſſible in our ideas is poſſible in the nature of things. Contradictions in abſtruſe, mathematical problems, are not poſſible in any ignorant man's ideas; but (merely for want of ideas) he knows not that they are contradictions. But neceſſary exiſtence is a clear idea; and negation of exiſtence is a clear idea, if I may uſe that word here; and though there

is often want of many mediums to prove remote, neceſſary properties, which are neceſſary only in conſequence of ſuppoſing the exiſtence of the ſubject; yet, I think, the caſe is not ſo in the point of neceſſary exiſtence, which is prime, and cannot be erroneouſly ſuppoſed away, by the mere abſence of intermediate ideas; but the contradiction is immediate, and neceſſarily obvious, every child ſees it, in the inſtance of immenſity; there are no mediums neceſſary; and the reaſon could not but be the ſame, if there were more than one neceſſary infinite.

I ACKNOWLEDGE, you have put the objection ſtronger than I ever ſaw it before; yet, I really think, the

the argument remains good. But 'tis much eaſier to think it obvious, than to expreſs it in words. I all along take it for granted, that you allow finiteneſs and neceſſary exiſtence to be contradictory.

I AM,

SIR,

Your very humble Servant,

London,
May 4, 1725.

S. CLARKE.

THIRD LETTER.

REVEREND SIR,

THE ſubſtance of your laſt, if I miſtake not, is this: That you think whatever is poſſible in our ideas is poſſible in the nature of things; that the ideas of neceſſary-exiſtence and negation of exiſtence are immediate, and conſequently the contradiction between them obvious at ſight, without the need of any mediums; and that, as the ideas of the two neceſſary-infinite-exiſtents, like two neceſſary-immenſities, would be perfectly coincident; ſo would the

the beings themſelves (if any ſuch there were) likewiſe be.

As to the firſt: Since you add no proof, I ſuppoſe it appears to you ſelf-evident; and, I muſt own, the contrary to me is no leſs clear: ſo that I do not ſee how we can diſpute farther on this head. The inſtance which I brought is, I acknowledge, ſhort of the caſe: nor can it be imagin'd, that an inſtance could be given of a thing poſſible in our ideas, and impoſſible in nature (becauſe, if any thing could be diſcovered impoſſible in nature, it muſt be a contradiction in our ideas too): but that there may be ſuch inſtance, is not (I think) an abſurd ſuppoſition.

To exiſt neceſſarily in our ideas, and poſſibly not to exiſt in our ideas, are indeed notions clear and immediate, and the oppoſition between them is evident at ſight: and ſo alſo, I grant, the contradiction would be between exiſting neceſſarily in nature, and poſſibly not exiſting in our ideas; if, as you ſay, whatever is poſſible in our ideas is poſſible in the nature of things: ſo that this alſo depends on the former. Two neceſſary-eternities, two neceſſary-immenſities, and in like manner two neceſſary-exiſtences, are not very proper expreſſions: for all abſtract ideas (as theſe are) being ſimple and uniform, are incapable of variety. But as, notwithſtanding the general notion

notion of ſolidity and diviſiblity in all bodies is one and the ſame, there may be many bodies ſolid and diviſible; ſo, if you ſuppoſe two neceſſary, eternal, and immenſe exiſtents, the abſtract ideas of neceſſary-exiſtence, eternity, and immenſity, would be the ſame in both; but they muſt notwithſtanding be diſtinct, neceſſarily-exiſtent, eternal, and immenſe beings. As the ſolidity of one body is not the ſolidity of another, nor the diviſibility of one body the diviſibility of another, though the general ideas of ſolidity and diviſibility in all bodies are the ſame; ſo the neceſſary-exiſtence of one Being is not the neceſſary-exiſtence of the other; nor the eternity of one the eternity of the other; nor the immenſity of one

the

the immenſity of the other; though the general ideas of neceſſary-exiſtence, eternity, and immenſity, be the ſame in both. I can ſee no more difficulty in this, than in ſuppoſing any two things, which are ſpecifically the ſame, to be numerically diſtinct. I allow finiteneſs and neceſſary-exiſtence to be contradictory: but the ſame diſtinction which I made of neceſſary-exiſtence is, I think, applicable to neceſſary-immenſity. As a Being may perhaps be neceſſarily exiſtent in his own nature, whom, through ignorance, we may imagine poſſibly not to exiſt; ſo it ſhould ſeem, that a Being may be in his own nature neceſſarily-immenſe, whoſe immenſity, for the ſame reaſon, appears not to us neceſſary.

ceſſary. But this diſtinction, I acknowledge, upon your principles, is good for nothing.

I CRAVE leave only to add, that if your notion of neceſſary-exiſtence was commonly received, there would, I believe, be no diſpute, whether the neceſſarily-exiſtent Being was but ONE. According to you, no Being can be neceſſarily-exiſtent, whoſe non-exiſtence is not in our ideas impoſſible; that is, in other words, whom we do not know to exiſt neceſſarily. That there is but ONE ſuch Being, every one will allow: ſo that all the controverſy which remains will be little more than about words.

UPON the whole, I am not ſo vain as to think your argument inconcluſive in itſelf, becauſe I am ſo unhappy as not to perceive the force of it. But, how glad ſoever I ſhould be to diſcern it, I know not how to expect that you ſhould give yourſelf any more trouble upon this account; what you have already done being too much ever to be forgotten, by,

REVEREND SIR,

Your's, with the greateſt reſpect,

May 10,
1725.

and under the higheſt obligations.

ANSWER

ANSWER

TO THE

THIRD LETTER.

SIR,

THE point wherein we differ is ultimately ſo nice; and the candor wherewith you write about it ſo great; and the poſſibility you think there is, that what is poſſible in our ideas may be not poſſible in the nature of things, is, in your own account of it, ſo bare and ſlender a poſſibility; that, I think, we can hardly be ſaid to differ more than fallible perſons, in this imperfect

ſtate, muſt, after the greateſt diligence, always be expected to do.

I WILL ſuggeſt only one thing more; to which I am led by your laſt:

THE reaſon why, though the abſtract idea of ſolidity is ſimple and uniform, yet the ſolidity of one body is not the ſolidity of another, is, (I think) becauſe you ſuppoſe the two bodies finite, and in different places. The ſolidity of two infinite bodies would (I think) be one and the ſame identical ſolidity. Nay, the ſolidity of two finite bodies, ſuppoſing them to be in one and the ſame place, would (I think) be one and the ſame ſolidity; that is, they would be one

and

and the ſame body. The application is obvious.

I AM,

SIR,

Your very humble ſervant,

May 15, 1725.

S. CLARKE.

FOURTH

FOURTH LETTER.

REVEREND SIR,

IF every ſubſtance excludes all other ſubſtances of the ſame kind, in the ſame ſpace, at the ſame time; the conſequence is clear, that two neceſſary-infinite-exiſtents are impoſſible.

THIS is indeed exceeding probable; it being impoſſible for us to conceive, how two things, of the ſame kind, exiſting in the ſame place, can be really diſtinct.

BUT,

But, whether this amounts to an expreſs contradiction, or may be owing to a prejudice, ariſing from our being converſant only with bodies, (ſuch as one born blind hath againſt the poſſibility of light and colours) is a queſtion, which, in the preſent ſtate, cannot perhaps abſolutely be determin'd; and if the principle be not certain, the concluſion, you know, cannot be demonſtrative.

But this, like the other point in which we ſeem to differ, is (as you obſerve) ſo nice, and indeed of ſo little importance, that I ſhould be really ſorry for having treſpaſſed ſo much upon you; was it not that, beſides the honour done to myſelf, you

you have had an opportunity for a work, which to a generous mind is no ſmall pleaſure; the inſtructing the ignorant.

I am, with repeated thanks for all your favours,

REVEREND SIR,

Your moſt obedient,

moſt obliged, and

moſt humble, ſervant.

MVSEVM BRITAN NICVM